

THE DIFFUSION OF GANDHARAN AND INDIAN MODELS IN SOUTH ASIA

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Despite its local success during and immediately after Kuṣāṇa rule, and considerable influence far beyond the region during this period, Gandharan art as such had no long lasting impact in South Asia proper. In general Indian artistic conceptions reemerged once Gandharan art ceased to flourish, even in its core area around Peshawar. Nevertheless, there are numerous features and motives in later South Asian art that ultimately can be traced back to Gandharan art. I will demonstrate these seemingly conflicting statements for South Asia on the hand of three motives which can be considered characteristic for Gandharan art.

The three motives merge in one of the most important and influential inventions of Gandhara, namely the representation of the Buddha's life on a stūpa. What is new is not the connection of the Buddha's life with the stūpa as such, but the particular way of its representation. Once displayed on the body of the stūpa – the oldest representations are found only on railings – the Buddha's life is represented in separate relief panels that are arranged

in chronological succession clockwise around the stūpa. These panels may be placed on the drum, as on the Sikri stūpa, or on the square podium underneath it, as on the well-known votive stūpa from Loriyan Tangai, today in Calcutta Indian Museum. The separation of the panels is achieved by pilasters, which most often are of pseudo-Corinthian shape. In addition, when Gandharan art began to flourish in the 1st century AD the Buddha image was shown in the narrative scenes, which was not the case earlier.

The three relevant elements merging here are:

- the structuring of vertical architectural surfaces by pilasters at regular intervals,
- the representation of a narrative, in particular the life of the Buddha, in separate panels forming a chronological succession, and
- the relation of body to garment in the representation of the Buddha.

Of these three elements, the structuring of architectural surfaces by pilasters, in particular the podium and the drum of a stūpa, was definitely the earliest. As has been demonstrated by Domenico Faccenna, early examples of this are preserved from Butkara I and Taxila, incidentally also the most important Gandharan sites in terms of chronology.¹ At that stage, that is in the second half of the 1st century BC, the Main Stūpa of Butkara I, deriving from a considerably earlier core, had a round drum enabling the circumambulation around the building. The railing of the drum is repeated as an ornament on the stūpa body itself. This stūpa still represents the early type that is also found in the area of Sanchi, as well as at diverse Western Indian cave sites, such as Bhaja, Bedsa, Kanheri and Pithalkora. In some examples of these sites, the railing becomes a decorative band on top of each successive drum. In Gandhara the railing is replaced by a band of pilasters structuring the vertical surfaces of the drum and the dome. A good example in this regard is the gigantic stūpa of Manikyala near Rawalpindi. The stūpa of Saidu Sharif, attributed to the 1st century AD, has already a much more complex structure. It combines a railing on the lower drum forming a circumambulatory passage with a band of pilasters which once framed narrative panels on the dome. Above it is a decorative railing pattern that has lost the distinctive Indian shape. According to the reconstruction of Faccenna, the Saidu Sharif stūpa already contained a continuous life of the Buddha around the stūpa.²

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1 See in particular FACCENNA 2007 Butkara, and KUWAYAMA 2007 Kañjūr Ashlar.

2 FACCENNA 1995 *Saidu Sharif*; FACCENNA 2001 *Fregio figurato*; and CALLIERI & FILIGENZI 2002 *Maestro*.

1. The Sikri stūpa with the scenes of the Buddha's life on a frieze separated by pilasters. Today in Lahore Museum (historic photograph, Asian Art Museum, Berlin).



The only Gandharan stūpa that survived complete enough, to give an idea how such a stūpa looked like, is that of Sikri, today in the Lahore Museum. It has to be noted, that the original succession of the scenes around the monument has been mixed up in the reconstruction.³ But independent of the succession of the scenes, the Sikri stūpa perfectly illustrates the mode in which the Buddha's life is shown on the stūpa drum (fig. 1). However, Gandhara was not the only South Asian region in which this new development became manifest. The same evolution is evident in the early Buddhist monuments in the realm of the Sātavāhana rulers, which also had close contacts to the West through sea trade. There, too, the older railing pattern is replaced by a structuring of the architectural surface through pilasters, which in the case of the Sātavāhana realm are of a local type. Again, the free surfaces were eventually used for relief depictions. As an example I am using the newly discovered stūpa of Kanganhalli, likely built in the 1st century AD

as well, and thus contemporary to the earliest Gandharan example of Saidu Sharif cited above.⁴ On the lower drum carved panels alternate with plain ones (pl. LXVII), while on the dome two bands of narrative scenes separated by pilasters were placed one above the other. The carved scenes either are single panels dedicated to a place and/or story, or a combination of several panels is used to narrate a story. Sometimes a single event may be represented on several panels, as in the case of the distribution of relics, where the kings riding on their elephants with the relic casket in hand are shown on several neighbouring panels.

Despite the similarities in the concept, the execution of the individual elements is strikingly different in the Kuṣāṇa and Sātavāhana realms. While Gandhara uses elements that are foreign to South Asia, Andhra clearly

3 For the Sikri stūpa see in particular ALAM 1994 Sikri stupa; DAR 1999 Sikri sculptures; and FOUCHER 1903 Bas-reliefs.

4 On the Kanganhalli/Kanaganahalli stūpa see ARAMAKI 2011 *Mahāyānasūtra movement*; POONACHA 2011 *Kanaganahalli*. My documentation of the Kanganhalli stupa, done in the first days of the new millennium, has been made possible by the then director general ASI, late Ajay Shankar. This documentation is now made available for study on my website <<http://www.luczanits.net>>.

2. Sanchi Stūpa 1, north gate. The Vessantara Jātaka on the lower architrave of the north gate with the city to the left and the jungle to the

right and the events of the narrative placed by location (digitally merged photographs C. Luczanits 1998. WHAV).



prefers native elements.⁵ This suggests that the usage of pilasters to structure the architectural surface is of foreign origin, but that it is transported separately to the two realms. In the art of the Sātavāhana, too, we find foreign motives, which apparently go directly back to Roman examples, converted into a local style.⁶

Although of at least twofold origin, structuring architectural surfaces met with little success in South Asia. The motive can be found on the stūpas of the western Indian cave sites such as Ellora, Cave 10 (Viśvakarma), and Ajanta, Cave 26, as well as on the earlier brick temple of Bhitargaon, where it is used for the base only. In the case of the temple, the motive gets immediately transformed in a way befitting the conception of a Hindu temple with its distinctive hierarchical segmentation. In general, be it a Buddhist cave or a Hindu temple, regular structuring of the architectural space becomes common only for the interior of the building, while the structure of its outer surface is ruled by other criteria.⁷

The structuring of a stūpa's drum through pilasters created rectangular fields which, by the 1st century AD, were used to depict the life of the Buddha in a chronological sequence. The archeological evidence is scant, since no single monument has been excavated in Gandhara that actually can be taken as representing the original arrangement, but fragmentary remains allow us to conclude that the Buddha's life has commonly been displayed in a chronological sequence arranged in the direction of clockwise circumambulation around the stūpa. If Faccenna is right concerning his interpretation of the stūpa of Saidu Sharif, then its frieze once depicted a complete life of the Buddha beginning with the dream of Māyā and ended with the distribution of relics.

Friezes on smaller stūpas only contained sections of the life as, for example, the events around the birth and childhood, on a drum section from Chatpat, today in the

Dir Museum at Chakdara.⁸ There the events depicted in chronological sequence are queen Māyā's dream, the interpretation of the dream, the birth of the Bodhisattva, the procession back to Kapilavastu in two scenes, Asita's prophecy, riding to school and wrestling as one of the competitions. Usually, there are only two or three scenes on the same stūpa section, as in the case of a Peshawar Museum relief showing the Bodhisattva's residence in, and the departure from the palace (pl. LXII). The scenes are to be read from right to left, in the direction of circumambulation.

The separation of a narrative in single fields in combination with their arrangement in chronological succession is not found in the earliest South Asian monuments depicting the Buddha's life. There, narratives are most often represented in single scenes showing one event or multiple successive ones with the repetition of the protagonist(s). The most distinguished arrangement for South Asia is, however, what I call 'landscape oriented'.⁹ In this composition, already used for the most complex narratives on the gates of Sanchi Stūpa 1, such as the Vessantara Jātaka, the events are placed within the environment they are taking place (fig. 2). Accordingly events happening within the city are found on the city side of the panel and those taking place in the wilderness on the side where a jungle is represented. Those on the way from the city to the jungle are shown in between.¹⁰ As such, placement and movement are considered more important than chronology. This type of composition is also typical for the later paintings of Ajanta. Needless to say, such an organisation can only be read with a guide. The chronological display of the Buddha's life is also found in a single case in Western India. Cave X of Ajanta, a cave in the old core of the complex, contains a life in eight scenes arranged in the direction of

8 Inv. no. CHPT-764. The complete cycle of this relief is published in the exhibition catalogue *Gandhara* 2008, Cat. no. 121 and p. 193-195, figs. 1-8.

9 See KRAMRISCH 1983 Nature.

10 To only speak of a 'continuous narrative', as DEHEIA 1997 *Buddhist art*, does in the case of the Sanchi Stūpa 1 Vessantara Jātaka, or of a 'narrative network', as she calls the arrangement in the Ajanta paintings, is besides the point since it gives no hint towards the actual organisation.

5 See MICHELL 1980 Pilastered walls.

6 See the numerous examples cited in STONE 1994 *Buddhist art*; and STONE 2008 Andhra Pradesh.

7 See, in particular, HARDY 1995 *Temple architecture*.

3. Jamalpur, Gupta Buddha image,
5th century. Mathura Museum, inv.
no. A5 (photo C. Luczanits 1998 41, 10.
WHAU).



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circumambulation around the hall as well as some stories of previous births.¹¹ In contrast to Gandhara, these scenes are not separated by corinthian pilasters but just follow one another. These paintings are traditionally attributed as early as the 2nd century BC, based on a palaeographic attribution that certainly needs to be reviewed.¹² It is much more likely, however, that this depiction has been done during the time the Kuṣāṇa ruled Northwest India, and that the Gandharan conception of the Buddha's life may well have been influential for this representation.

As Taddei has pointed out, the chronological display of the Buddha's life around a stūpa, in particular when it begins with the primary vow to become a Buddha in front of Buddha Dīpaṃkara, forms a 'spiritual biography'. A circumambulation of the stūpa thus equals a Buddha's spiritual development from the first expression of the intention to become Buddha to achieving awakening. Following Taddei, both the chronological arrangement of single scenes as well as the hagiography spanning numerous lives are very likely Gandharan inventions.¹³

In this case too, similar conceptions are found in the realm of the Sātavāhana and their local successors, the Ikṣvaku, in particular at sites such as Kanganhalli, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and Goli. The large stūpa representations of Amaravati show the life of the Buddha in a chronological sequence on the stūpa's drum, just in the same way as it is found in Gandhara (pl. LXVIII).

In Kanganhalli five or six key scenes of the Buddha's life were carved on massive stone bars probably during the 3rd century AD (pl. LXIII). These were once placed on the front side of the *āyaka*-platforms facing the approaching visitors. Regional pillars with lion capitals and railing pillars with the characteristic lotus rosettes were used to divide the scenes. This arrangement could have been adopted from Gandhara, but neither the iconography of the scenes nor the absence of the Buddha image in the scenes support such a view. Instead, we likely have again a parallel development in Gandhara and Andhra, but in this case the western influence on this type of representation remains unclear.

While the single panel arrangement of narratives has later been used in Central Asia – the best example being Cave 110, the so-called Treppenhöhle, in Kizil/

11 See the meticulous analysis of the different narratives in SCHLINGLOFF 2000 *Ajanta*, in particular the Buddha's life p. 41–71. In the case of the Saddanta Jātaka, the story of the Buddha's previous existence as a six-tusked Elephant, the arrangement by place takes precedence again (see *Ibid.*, 35–38).

12 The scant argument is summarised *Ibid.*, 15–16, and the inscription analysed in terms of content on p. 49–51.

13 See TADDEI 1999 Narrative.

4. Gilgit, teaching Buddha, c. 8th century, Lhasa Potala, Lima Lhakhang, inv. no. K1383 (after SCHROEDER 2001 *Buddhist sculptures*, 2-19B).

Quizil¹⁴ – as well as in India, as on steles roughly to be attributed to the 6th century AD depicting the main events of the Buddha's life in a hierarchical arrangement, pilasters or any other architectural element as scene dividers become more and more rare. A lasting impact of the Gandharan period invention may be seen in the representation of narratives in bands one above each other, as in the depiction of the Rāmāyaṇa in the courtyard of the Kailāśa Temple in Ellora. This arrangement is frequently found in the Himalayas as well. Generally, Tibetan depictions of the Buddha's life emphasise the chronological succession of the events. However, these latter examples are much too remote to be considered a direct influence of Kuṣāṇa and Sātavāhana art.

As in the later narrative depictions of Kanganhalli, the Buddha was not shown in India in the earliest representations, but his image was integrative part of Gandharan narrative depictions. In fact, the realm of Kuṣāṇa rule, be it Mathura or Gandhara, is also responsible for the creation of the Buddha image, which was conceived in both art schools independently, and according to different concepts concerning the qualities the image should convey. They thus represent entirely different types of Buddha image, the Mathura one emphasising the ruler or *cakravartin* and the Gandharan one the meditative aspect of the Buddha.¹⁵

The images preferred in the two schools can also serve as examples for the entirely different conceptions that these images represent in terms of the relationship of body and dress. The Mathura school of sculpture emphasises the body which is visible in its entirety through the diaphanous dress (pl. LXV). There is no attempt to reproduce the natural fall of the drapery. Only the shawl wrapped around the proper left arm receives volume. This preference for the body over the garment is characteristic for South Asian art in general. In contrast, the fall of the monastic robes plays a major role in the Gandharan Buddha image (pl. LXVI). Not only is there an attempt to represent the robes in a much more natural manner, but the Buddha's outer mantel (*saṃghāṭi*), is also emphasised by showing the standing Buddha holding one end of the garment in the left hand.¹⁶

Interestingly, the late 3rd or early 4th century Buddha images of Kanganhalli, too, express an interest in the dress that is unusual for South Asian sculpture of this



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period, even if their typology rather follows that of the Mathura school and there is no real attempt to render a natural fall of the garment (pl. LXIV).

As is well known, the two early Buddha types influenced each other towards what is considered the ideal Buddha representation during the Gupta period, where the Mathura type preserves the folds of the Gandharan Buddha, but it is the Indian emphasis of the body that is predominant again even if that body becomes highly idealised (fig. 3).

Nevertheless, more naturalistic representations of the dress are occasionally found in the later art schools of Northwest India as well, not only in the beautiful early Viṣṇu bronze of the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin, but also in regional Northwest Indian schools of art where Buddhism continued to be present. Localised variants of Gandharan derived dress renderings are found in the later art of the Swat valley, the high quality images of the small

14 This is the most extensive representation of the Buddha's life in Central Asia. See, for example, YALDIZ 1987 *Chinesisch-Zentralasien*, 79-80, Abb. 45.1.

15 See in particular HÄRTEL 1985 Kapardin Buddha.

16 On the different visual types of Gandharan Buddha images, see RHI 2008 *Buddha images*.

Gilgit dominion that flourished in the 7th and 8th centuries (fig. 4), in Kashmir and in later western Himalayan schools of art. However, while the dress does retain a certain emphasis in these schools, it also becomes highly stylised, and as in Gupta art, only certain details of the dress that do not cover the body are rendered three-dimensionally. In these cases, the dress serves more to frame the body of the image than to represent an actual fall of the garment.

The Gandharan conception of the Buddha's dress retained a somewhat stronger influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and thus continued to influence the art of neighbouring countries for a considerable period. An interesting case in point is the artistic cross current between 7th and 8th century Tang China and the contemporary art of Kashmir, as has been worked out by Marilyn M. Rhie in a seminal article.¹⁷

To conclude, of the three elements focused on here, only the conception of the Buddha's robe met with lasting success in the South Asian region, even if the Indian emphasis on the Buddha's body predominates later depictions. Nevertheless, all three examples show that in South Asia the direct impression of Gandharan art did last only in rather obscured form, even in its core area. What becomes dominant again, once Gandharan art ceased to flourish, conforms more to Indian than to western conceptions. Of particular interest is the fact that for all three motives considered typical for Gandharan art parallel developments can be seen in Central and Western India, which can not be explained as direct influence from Gandhara. The examples, thus, demonstrate the complex process of adoption and adaptation of western elements in South Asia far beyond Gandhara, and their integration and eventual replacement through regional ones.

¹⁷ RHIE 1988 *Interrelationship*.

Pl. LXII. The Bodhisattva meditating, the city goddess, and the Bodhisattva departing from the palace. Peshawar Museum (photograph Peter Oszvald, Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn).

Pl. LXIII. Kanganhalli, east side. Section of an āyaka-panel with scenes from the Buddha's life arranged in chronological sequence from right to left and divided by railing pillars (photograph C. Luczanits 2000 34, 43. WHAV).

Pl. LXIV. Kanganhalli, Buddha image, late 3rd/early 4th century (photograph C. Luczanits 2000 42, 04. WHAV).



LXII



LXIII



LXIV

Pl. LXV. Maholi, early Mathura school
Buddha image, first half of the 2nd
century. Mathura Museum, inv. no. 2748
(photo C. Luczanits 1998 42, 14. WHAV).

Pl. LXVI. Early Gandharan school
Buddha image, probably around
100 AD. Peshawar Museum (photo
C. Luczanits 2007 D1898).



LXVI

Pl. LXVII. Kanganhalli stūpa, section of the lower drum with three stone panels in their original location, the

middle one not carved (photograph C. Luczanits 2000 41, 02. WHAV).

Pl. LXVIII. Amaravati, central section of a large stūpa relief with the life of the Buddha in chronological sequence from

left to right on the upper most relief frieze. Madras Museum (photograph C. Luczanits 2006 D1879).



LXVII



LXVIII

ART ET CIVILISATIONS DE L'ORIENT HELLÉNISÉ

RENCONTRES ET ÉCHANGES CULTURELS
D'ALEXANDRE AUX SASSANIDES

sous la direction de Pierre LERICHE

Hommage à Daniel Schlumberger

P
Picard

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